

I'm not ashamed to admit it. This poor and humble Franciscan- this lover of poverty- I wanted to be rich. I wanted to have lots of money and lots of things and all that. Now of course it's not a bad thing in and of itself to be rich- it allows you to appreciate the good things of God's creation and more importantly to help people in need and make the world a better place- but I wanted to be rich just for me.

Which is why I got a degree in Accounting, because I had the strange notion that accountants are rich- most of them are not- but still. And when I was a teenager, I used to pore over those catalogs from Swiss Colony- you know, the ones you get in the mail with the cakes and the candies on the cover that look too perfect to be true- and I used to fantasize about being able to give those cakes and candies and petit fours and those gift baskets to every member of my family at Christmas. Not a very impressive way to be rich, granted, but that's how peculiar I was. Subconsciously, I thought they would love me more, or they would love me better, if I gave them gifts that would impress them. And the Ultimate Meat and Cheese Gift or a Bavarian Crème Torte would do the trick.

*The Magi prostrated themselves before the child and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

Am I suggesting that the Magi brought these rare and precious gifts to impress the Holy Family and win their love and respect? Of course not. But you do wonder what happened to those gifts. Did Joseph and Mary sell them when they were totally without money and those items could bring a pretty penny? Or perhaps more likely, did they end up in a corner of the tiny house they lived in, gathering dust and taking up valuable space?

Mary and Joseph would have been just as happy to see the Magi even if they did not bring any gifts at all. They would have been just as thrilled that these men came all that way just to share in their happiness and just to share in their joy.

And it's the same thing with us and God. As they say, God is not impressed.

We don't need to bring Him anything- everything is ultimately His anyway, and as Psalm 116 says "*What return can I make for all the goodness of the Lord to me?*" Which is a rhetorical statement, and which simply means that we can never even begin to pay back to the Lord what we owe Him and we can never begin to win His love and His respect for us by what we do or what we think or what we believe or who we are.

All God wants is a simple and humble heart that is happy to be in His house, worshipping Him and loving Him and taking care of His other children and not excluding anyone from His family, as if we had that power anyway.

The fact that the Magi were Gentiles- that is, they were not Jews- is one of many indications in the New Testament that Jesus came not only to save the people of Israel, but rather to save all nations, all peoples. And Jesus showed that all throughout His ministry as He accepted the people that His society ostracized, had pushed to the margins of their society- the tax collectors, the sick, those of different ethnic backgrounds- and He risked the rejection of His society because He knew that God's love knows no boundaries, knows no reason to exclude anyone from the Kingdom of God.

And what about us? Do we invite all people into our lives, or are there some people who, for whatever reason, we want to shut out from us? Do we judge one another and do we exclude one another?

It doesn't have to be this way. By remembering that God loves all people, no matter who they are or what they have done, we can relate to one another as one child of God to another. This doesn't mean looking past what needs to be changed and what needs to be addressed- what it does mean is that we see God within each person and allow that realization to shape how we deal with one another and how we treat one another. And that would make God happier than you could ever imagine.

I did actually buy some things from Swiss Colony when I started making some good money, and I was not impressed. Smaller than what the photo in the catalog makes you think you are getting, and the cakes and the candies are sickly sweet, and the petit fours- what I especially wanted- left a strange aftertaste.

Not what I was expecting, but then again- apart from the love of God- what is?